

George Washington's Surveying Office
Ferry Farm, Stafford County,
Nr. Fredericksburg, Virginia

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District No. VA.

Historic American Buildings Survey
Philip N. Stern, District Officer
21 law Building, Fredericksburg, Va.

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GEORGE WASHINGTON'S SURVEYING OFFICE
Ferry Farm, Stafford County, Nr. Fredericksburg, Virginia

Owner: The George Washington Foundation.

Date of Erection: Doubtful, probably 2nd quarter ^{18th} ~~19th~~ century.

Architect: Unknown.

Builder: Unknown.

Present Condition: Poor.

Number of Stories: One and one-half.

Materials of Construction: Frame.

Other Existing Records: (See text)

Additional Data: (See following pages.)

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GEORGE WASHINGTON'S SURVEYING OFFICE

Ferry Farm, also known as Pine Grove or the River Farm, was one of the three farms owned by George Washington's father, Augustine, who died April 12, 1743, leaving this farm which was situated directly across the Rappahannock River from Fredericksburg, Virginia to George Washington who would possess it when he became of age. In the meantime Mary, his mother, was to live on and operate the farm.

"At this place, George Washington lived most of the time from 1739 to 1747. Here, according to tradition, he cut down the cherry tree. Washington's father died here in 1743; the farm was his share of the paternal estate. His mother lived here until 1771". (1)

"The old farm buildings have disappeared with one noteworthy exception. This is the little one-story structure which the youthful Washington used as a workroom(?) the only structure now in existence which is positively known to have been in constant use by him during his boyhood. This hallowed shrine of courageous youth - little more than a lean-to hut and rapidly falling into decay - is overshadowed by the modern two and one-half story building placed against it some years ago. The new farm buildings, nestling among the trees on the highland, occupy practically the same site as those of George Washington's day." (2)

".....The only old building is the office where Washington worked..... The Ferry Farm now belongs to the George Washington Foundation which is seeking to restore it fully and make it a national shrine". (3)

The only historic data stating that he used this building as a surveying office comes from his diaries in which he mentions doing some surveying "on my mother's farm". However, according to well-founded tradition, George Washington did use this little structure as a surveying office at different times on his visits to the farm after he had left it in 1743 immediately after his father's death.

Mr. Chester Coolrick, of Fredericksburg, Virginia, states that his father, who was born in 1843, only 44 years after Washington's death, told him about being taken over to Ferry Farm by

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his parents who pointed out this building as being Washington's surveying office. It is upon such hearsay that the tradition is founded.

REFERENCES:

1. Virginia Highway Historical Markers -- Page 55.
2. Washington -- By Joseph Dillaway Sawyer -- Pages 79-80.
3. Fredericksburg - Historical and Business Guide -- Page 20.

Architectural Observations.

Recent alterations to the George Washington Surveyors office, in the form of complete new wood sheathing on the interior, have made some of the actual dimensions inaccessible. This is particularly true of the fireplace and attic. The size of the former was determined only after extensive probing, the latter by observation and deduction. There is strong reason to believe that the attic originally had an opening into the room below, although there is none at present. Several small holes in the weather boarding furnish glimpses of the interior, and dimly discerned objects therein would seem to indicate that it had been used at one time or another - probably as a storeroom.

Due to the presence of obviously new flooring, the construction of the hearth is absolutely indeterminable. The level of the original flooring was determined by the construction of the entrance door jamb and checked by probing.

All the shingles and most of the weather boarding on the present building have been replaced, and are now protected from the ravages of the elements by a large tin roof built over the entire structure. A few of the original weather boards were found on the north wall and serve as a basis for all weather boarding as shown on the drawings. The west wall is now obscured by a modern two and one-half story building which was moved directly against it.

The bricks in the lower part of the chimney are quite old and are apparently hand-made, in sharp contrast to those in the upper part, which has been re-topped in the past thirty years with obviously newer machine-made bricks. Since there are no traces of paint discernible, it is believed that only whitewash has ever been used on the exterior of this building. Examination of plaster fragments indicates that the interior was similarly treated.

Report By:

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